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Vanished civilisation hidden treasure theories analysis

Abstract. The research relevance is determined by the substantial potential of the scientific search for information and sources on the life of the Scythians. Since the 18th century, researchers have thoroughly begun to approach the excavation of Scythian mounds in search of legendary treasures. Periodic finds with significant accompanying material memos provide more and more reasons to assert that the Scythian Herrhos, about which Herodotus wrote, really existed, but its location is still a mystery. This study presents the main versions and theories about the hidden treasures of the vanished Scythian civilization. The study involves the analysis of key hypotheses about the location of Scythian treasures and their correlation with objectively possible historical circumstances of their existence and location. The leading approach in the study is the analytical method, alongside synthesis, analogy, induction, deduction, comparative, systemic, and reductionism. As a result, the most common theories about the existence of Scythian treasures were presented, along with arguments confirming or refuting these positions using written evidence and archaeological materials. The study focuses on such an important aspect of Scythian culture as archaeological excavations and their legitimacy. The growing black archaeology issue is most presented in the case of the Scythian mounds, which greatly complicates scientific activity and casts doubt on the authenticity of the materials discovered as a result of excavations of already robbed burials. The materials of the study are of particular value to anyone interested in Scythian culture, including the sphere of scientific interests of historians, archaeologists, geologists, writers, etc. The investigation of the Scythians and their life remains a promising scientific area, which provides for further archaeological excavations, the examination of material and written sources, the analysis of information of various kinds considering cross-cultural studies, based on the area of distribution of finds of the Scythian period

Keywords: mound; burial; animal style; Scythian gold; Herrhos

Article's History: Received: 20.12.2023; Revised: 16.04.2024; Accepted: 07.05.2024

INTRODUCTION

The research relevance is determined by the historical value of Scythian gold, as the military campaigns of the Scythians were an important phenomenon that influenced a range of cultures. The Scythians are one of the most interesting and least studied civilisations of the ancient world. The study of their cultural heritage, including hidden

treasures, can shed light on the history and way of life of these people, expanding the understanding of Scythian life and customs. The study of hidden treasures can have practical applications in the development of tourism and cultural exchange. The discovery and exploration of new sites can increase interest in the regions and contribute to

Suggested Citation:

Trushaj, A. (2024). Vanished civilisation hidden treasure theories analysis. *Interdisciplinary Cultural and Humanities Review*, 3(1), 25-33. doi: 10.59214/cultural/1.2024.25.

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the development of tourist infrastructure. The research of the treasures of the Scythian civilisation remains relevant and important for the scientific and cultural community, making an important contribution to understanding the past and supporting the preservation of cultural heritage.

S. Aryamanesh and S. Khorashadi (2021), as well as J. Johnson (2018), indicated that the Scythians are nomadic Iranian-speaking tribes that inhabited vast territories in the Central Eurasian steppes from the 9th century BC to the 4th century AD. Recently, many studies and books on the topic were published, which are based on current archaeological finds. The burial practices are often the main ones in the establishment of the idea of the life of the Scythians. According to M. Gross (2021), researchers possess said knowledge from several written testimonies left by other peoples (since the Scythians do not have their written sources): Greeks, Chinese, Persians, and Indians. Thus, the image of the Scythians is created in a geopolitical context, where the authors contrast their way of life with the image of the Scythians. Such contrasts establish a sharp, categorical attitude, in which the observer, acting in this case as the author, may not objectively interpret their activities.

The issues of legendary treasure search always attracted researchers, and everyone interested in this matter. Scythian treasures have been haunting seekers of treasures and unique historical finds for several centuries. This is determined by the fact that there are legends about the countless valuables stored in the Scythian tombs. This interest is fuelled by the periodic finds of archaeologists in burial mounds or temples. Those volumes of gold artefacts found at the excavation sites may provide reasonable grounds for the existence of larger burials, possibly existing in Herrhos described by Herodotus.

G. Vertienko (2017) pointed out that historiography on this issue holds various theories on the location of Scythian graves. However, almost all of them are based on the information provided by Herodotus. The disputableness of the localisation of Herrhos as a valley of royal burials is caused, primarily, by the lack of a certain local binding. Conventionally, Herodotus places Herrhos in the north of Scythia, orienting along the Borysthenes (modern Dnipro), yet indicating the distance in days passed. For a long time, there have been discussions among researchers regarding Herodotus' statement about forty days of sailing through an area called Herrhos, mentioning that Borysthenes reaches the lands of Scythian farmers after ten days of sailing.

Hypotheses concerning the inaccurate statement made by Herodotus were put forward, suggesting that he should have indicated not forty, but fourteen days, aligning better with geographical realities. Alternatively, questions arose about the reliability of the information the historian received from the geographer. However, most researchers are inclined to accept the data on a forty-day voyage as the real distance to Herrhos. Some studies contain the statement that this time implies a sacred meaning, which lies in the period of the ritual accompaniment of the deceased to the next world before arriving in Herrhos. There are several other versions, according to which the mythical Scythian necropolis is located in the

watershed area of the Dnipro and Molochna rivers (which, according to some information, was identified with the Herrhos river according to Herodotus) either on the territory of the discovered early Scythian monuments of the Kuban and the Caucasus or in areas near Kyiv, etc. The etymology of the toponym Herrhos in the Iranian languages, among other things, has the meaning "to mourn", and, accordingly, since preparations for the afterlife took place in Herrhos, the origin of the name itself can be associated with this meaning.

According to Y. Liu *et al.* (2021), despite the difficulties in obtaining accurate data on the topographic location of Herrhos and other Scythian burials, a theoretical approach to the analysis of information from archaeological and written sources provides exhaustive, but thorough evidence of the life of the Scythians. The problem is that the sacred funerary archaeological monuments at the disposal of researchers can largely distort the understanding of the social life of a given tribe. Rather, they demonstrate several aspects, such as worldview, certain types of crafts, the nature of life in an exclusively ritual context, and the social status of the buried people.

The novelty is that in modern conditions this object provides an opportunity to conduct a more detailed study of the life of our ancestors, helps learn in detail the culture of this folk, study the unique monuments of world culture, and study its mythology in the way that such an ancient people displayed their picture of the world through arts and crafts and jewellery. The main study goal is to identify the location of these treasures and to learn in detail about their appearance. The study aims to analyse the main hypotheses according to which the treasures of civilization can be found.

General scientific theoretical methods were used: analysis and synthesis (to consider theories and their aspects, based on which confirmation or refutation was conducted), induction and deduction (to conclude based on the general laws of the creation of Scythian burials and private judgments about specific features of the location of treasures), abstraction (to highlight the essential characteristics of objects and their more detailed analysis without involving extraneous details), reductionism (as a basic principle of the study based on methods of explaining complex phenomena on simple examples), comparative (for comparative analysis of material finds of different types of burial mounds), systematic (for a thorough and consistent presentation of the material). These methods were used for an integrated approach, ensuring a more in-depth investigation of the issue along with the studies in various fields (geology, archaeology, history, etc.) to comprehensively examine the issue and conclude based on reliable evidence.

SCYTHIAN CULTURE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES AND CULTURAL INTERACTIONS

Scythian culture is a wide field of scientific activity. In the context of archaeological excavations, sensational discoveries were made that shed light on the life of the Scythians. The full picture of their history will never be available, as the nomadic life of the Scythians does not allow exploring their settlements. Constant movement

in search of pastures for livestock forced the Scythians to be mobile, which determines the lack of archaeological finds, and characteristics, for example, of agricultural sedentary cultures. Therefore, the basis for scientific publications about the Scythians is, firstly, archaeological finds and written sources of contemporaries of the Scythians.

The analysis of the publications given in this study developed a general idea of the grounds for the emergence of theories about the lost Scythian treasures. It is worth starting with the value of existing finds that bear evidence of the rich contents of Scythian tombs. A special distinguishing feature is the animal style, which makes the Scythian jewellery easily recognisable. This is an approach to decoration, which is based on the image of animalistic subjects. P. Andreeva (2018) thoroughly analyses zoomorphic motifs in Scythian jewellery and highlights several key features of the strategic placement of images of certain species of animals and birds on objects, emphasising their role as indicators of social status at the time of the funeral ceremony and as an accompanying inventory to the afterlife.

More information about the Scythians is present in the studies of S. Bremner (2018), as well as S. Aryamanesh and S. Khorashadi (2021), and other researchers, which provide theories of the ethnogenesis of the Scythians, the processes of their settlement and their role in the Central Eurasian steppes. An important point is the thesis on the possibility of determining the interactions of the Scythians with various ancient cultures since the map of the Scythian world of the 6th-4th centuries BC indicates the spread of the Scythians both along the mountain ranges and along the Caspian Sea, along the Black Sea to Thrace and the outskirts of the Greek world. Hence, the issue of geopolitics and their cultural contacts with other peoples. It is known from Herodotus about the campaign of the Persian king Darius I against the Scythians, contacts with Greek jewellers and many other economic, political, and social ties. A. Berzovan (2021) highlighted a treasure trove of items of the Scythian tradition, discovered during archaeological research in the Batogani county (Romania), dating back to approximately the 5th century BC, testifying to their complex relationship with the Thracians. Y. Liu *et al.* (2021) noted that contact with Greek society is evidenced by the fact that a great part of the gold jewellery found in the Scythian royal tombs of the Black Sea region was influenced by Greek art.

According to C. Meyer (2020), the idea of cultural perception built on antipodes is noteworthy from the standpoint of the information about the Scythians described in ancient sources. At that time, in the absence of the principle of cultural relativism in scientific works, the authors often expressed a personal or socially formed attitude towards other people. Thus, the definition through civilisational antitypes was the basis of almost all the works of that time. The Greeks viewed the Scythians as “others”, and the contrast between sedentarism and nomadism served as a reason for a biased attitude. On the other hand, Herodotus admires the Scythian skill of fighting, focusing on the abilities of most of them to master archery perfectly while riding. The Scythian tactics of warfare were rather evasive, as can be seen from the description of the

campaign of Darius I in 512 BC. What on his part was a retreat or hiding from the battle was nothing more than a way to minimise losses without engaging in an open battle with an enemy outnumbered. There is an idea that the Scythians fought in the same way as the Cossacks later did, creating a temporary fortification from carts. Undoubtedly, the steppe way of life influenced the development of Scythians' methods of fighting, they mastered serious military technical training in difficult open terrain conditions. Since their methods of combat were innovative in a certain way, they showed their efficiency and effectiveness by the 1st millennium BC.

EXPLORING THE SCYTHIANS: CHALLENGES IN LOCATING HERRHOS AND PRESERVING NOMADIC HERITAGE

Historical studies still cannot determine the exact location of the legendary Herrhos with full confidence. However, several theories described above assert that the royal burials of the Scythians existed since such finds (such as burial mounds and temples (Fig. 1, 2)) are found in the territory known as Scythia. It is important to understand that the Scythians, in general, were not a monolithic association or a political entity. The Scythians did not have a state in the modern definition. The Scythians were rather a collection of tribes that spoke related languages and had a similar culture, according to O.P. Siekierska (2019). The Scythians had no written language, which excludes the possibility of learning about them from their sources, and due to the nomadic lifestyle, there were practically no settlements for archaeological research. The only information that describes the life of the Scythians is archaeological data obtained from burials (especially burial mounds) and written sources of contemporaries, and eyewitnesses who somehow encountered the nomadic people. In the 7th century BC, a complex “core-periphery” system was developed, in which true nomadism with all its features was only a part, acting as one of the elements of the general way of life of the Scythians. There was a change in the economic structure of steppe life in the development of large-scale foreign trade with the Greeks of the Black Sea region and internal trade between the centres of Scythian associations, as noted in the work of J.J. Chu (2022).



Figure 1. Hayman's grave mound (Ukraine)
Source: The most famous Scythian mounds of Ukraine (2019)



Figure 2. Tovsta Mohyla mound (Ukraine)

Source: The most famous Scythian mounds of Ukraine (2019)

Many significant sites were in Russia. An unlooted main grave was found at Arzhan-2 (Fig. 3); a grave covered with a mound in the Altai mountains, near the village of Krasny Yar (Fig. 4), and others.



Figure 3. The unrobbed grave at Arzhan-2

Source: Scythians, ice mummies and burial mounds (2017)



Figure 4. The grave of a Scythian warrior and his horse

Source: Archaeologists unearth remains of a Scythian warrior in a golden cloak and his horse (2015)

There are many theories regarding the origin of the Scythians. H. Gnechchi-Ruscone *et al.* (2021), and some other researchers distinguish three main hypotheses: the

Pontic-Caspian (supported by linguistic evidence and belonging to the Iranian-speaking peoples), the Kazakh steppe (confirmed by several archaeological finds of the early Scythian period), and the theory of multiple independent origin from genetically different groups, which, in the process of interaction between themselves and other peoples, adopted the features of each other and developed their special type, as mentioned by H. Gnechchi-Ruscone *et al.* (2021). M. Gross (2021) concluded that modern scientific approaches can be used to determine the genetic affiliation of the Scythians more clearly. Molecular studies, including the study of more than hundreds of human genomes from Scythian graves, can show who the Scythians were.

P. Osinsky (2020) noted that the first millennium BC can be considered the period of development of the political culture of the Eurasian nomads since Scythians played an integral role in this process. In the 7th century BC, the Scythians mastered the territories of Eurasia from the Black Sea to the borders of China. Little is known about them outside contemporary writings until the end of the 18th century. This period is denoted by an active scientific interest in ancient cultures. Earlier, engineers and farmers also periodically discovered items from Scythian graves, but these finds were not widely publicised. Only by the beginning of the 20th century, unique finds were presented to the world. The richness of the Scythian culture became the property of the world cultural legacy with the organised activities of researchers who methodically approached the excavation of ancient graves and then thoroughly presented the results of their work in scientific publications, according to S. Łukasik *et al.* (2021).

F. Chen *et al.* (2021) noted that the findings of the Hornyi Altai were especially relevant. Currently, the issue of the preservation and protection of these memos remains open. This is determined by climatic changes that affect the safety of the ice tombs of this region. The mounds of the Hornyi Altai contain unique relics of the Scythian civilisation, which flourished in the steppes, and they were kept intact in the permafrost for more than two and a half thousand years. This aspect of the preservation of historical monuments is more relevant than ever in connection with global changes, primarily warming, which can destroy biomaterials that may have been preserved there. A serious threat to the examination of the cultural legacy of the Scythians is black archaeologists who conduct excavations illegally and resell the artefacts found for profit. This crime is punishable by law, but it does not always stop the robbers from trying to benefit from the discovered valuables. As a result, the structure of burial mounds is destroyed, which can, primarily, lead to the filling of the burial and complicate access to artefacts. Unprofessionalism and indifference to the historical value of the Scythian treasures can cause damage to the finds, and, often, their loss to the scientific community, as they fall to private individuals or special collections. In such conditions, after the discovery of the robbed tombs by researchers, it is difficult to conduct a full-fledged analysis of the find. The data would be unreliable given the absence of several objects and the fact that it is no longer possible to restore the mound to its original form.

SCYTHIAN TREASURES: UNRAVELING THE LEGEND OF KOLAKSAY

AND THE PHENOMENON OF SCYTHIAN GOLD

As for Scythian treasures, it is worth mentioning that one of the legends that somehow relates to nomadic treasures is the story of Kolaksay. He is the hero of the Scythian ethnogonic legend. According to Herodotus, Kolaksay was the youngest son of the mythical Targitaos, the first ancestor of the Scythians. The name Kolaksay itself comes from the Indo-Iranian language and is interpreted by linguists as “the sun”. Hence, it is possible to compare this fact with the cult of the sun existing in the Scythian worldview. According to legend, Kolaksay took possession of the so-called insignia: a golden plough with a yoke, an axe, and a bowl, which provided power over other Scythian tribes. He gave these items to his sons, thus dividing Scythia into three kingdoms. Furthermore, there were Scythians-nomads, Scythians-farmers, and royal Scythians (skolots). Thus, not all Scythians were exclusively nomads, which is confirmed by written sources, including Herodotus, and certain archaeological finds that include elements of agricultural implements. These legendary items became landmarks for the search for Scythian treasures, as they are supposedly considered the richest relics of Scythian culture, and, admittedly, the most precious. In attempts to find the same cup, it was often identified with the cups found in burial mounds (for example, Haimanova mohyla, Chmyreva mohyla, Solokha, etc.) (Fig. 5, 6), but their correspondence to the cup owned by Kolaksay remains in doubt, as written by A. Van de Ven (2018).



Figure 5. A cup found in the Solokha mound

Source: The most famous Scythian mounds of Ukraine (2019)



Figure 6. A cup found in the Haimanova Mohyla

Source: The most famous Scythian mounds of Ukraine (2019)

G. Caspari (2020) highlighted the phenomenon of Scythian gold, which is manifested in the variety of manufacturing technologies, techniques, and drawings used

for the design of rich jewellery and clear detailing, which forms an idea of the high technical and aesthetic levels of development of Scythian art. The craftsmanship and character of the equipment can be judged by the hallmarks of the tools and the analysis of the surface structures of the decorations. Early dating of these finds, which became possible due to a combination of radiocarbon and dendrochronological analysis, confirms the assumption that a particular style of metalworking is characteristic of various regions of Scythia, having many similar qualities. The state of the jewellery gives grounds for asserting the lifetime use by its owner, as evidenced by signs of wear. For example, researchers claim that this is what happened with the well-known find from Tovsta Mohyla – the golden Pectoral (Fig. 7), on which some details are probably missing, traces of repair are visible, and there is wear of the enamel. Thus, it can be argued that the inventory accompanying the funeral rites could serve a person during life, and after death, according to the beliefs of the Scythians, had to accompany them to the afterlife.



Figure 7. On the left is a photo of a golden pectoral.

On the right, the archaeologist who found the golden pectoral, Ukrainian scientist Boris Mozolevskyi

Source: Scythian gold pectoral from the Fat Grave (2014)

O.P. Siekierska (2019) noted that the question of where the Scythians found large quantities of gold to make jewellery remains open. Gold, as the personification of the cult of the sun, immortality, and power among the Scythians, was valued. According to one version, gold came to the Scythians from the Greeks, according to another – there were deposits of precious metal in their territory and the Scythians mined it in various ways. Such deposits are called Nagolny Ridge, Nikopol deposits, areas near Meotida (Sea of Azov), the area from the Urals to Altai, etc. There is a well-known story that the Scythians periodically crossed the Caucasus Mountains, raiding Assyrians and Medes in the south. Written evidence from Persian and Egyptian sources proves that they conquered Assyria, after which they moved west (the territory of modern Syria), then plundered Palestine, and reached the borders of Egypt. According to written sources in the 6th century BC, the pharaoh paid the Scythians for their retreat, respectively, in these facts, another possible source of gold for the Scythians can be considered since the warlike nomadic tribes of the Scythians could often resort to conquest. The degrees of interest of researchers vary depending on the location of different burial mounds. For example, many

Scythian burials have been discovered in the Caucasus, although, the monumental finds of conditional Western Scythia or those that are better preserved are addressed more. Thus, the mounds of the steppe zone of Ukraine are of serious interest to researchers as the world-famous Scythian jewellery was found there. These are the mound Tovsta Mohyla in the modern Dnipropetrovsk region, explored in 1971, where a golden pectoral was discovered, the Solokha mound in the Zaporizhzhia region, where a Scythian golden comb was found, Chortomlyk in the Dnipropetrovsk region, where a vase and thousands of other finds were discovered (Fig. 8, 9).



Figure 8. The golden comb from the Solokha mound
Source: The most famous Scythian mounds of Ukraine (2019)



Figure 9. The amphora vase from Chortomlyk mound
Source: The most famous Scythian mounds of Ukraine (2019)

The Scythians interred their deceased and identified the burial sites with mounds. Extending from northern China through southern Siberia to the northern Black Sea, this expansive steppe region is adorned with tens of thousands of these mounds. While some have fallen victim to looting, numerous Scythian treasures have been unearthed and are showcased in museums worldwide.

SCYTHIANS AND GREEKS: A COMPLEX TAPESTRY OF CULTURAL INTERACTIONS AND WORLDVIEWS

It is worth noting the role of the relations of the Scythians with the Greeks separately since the influence of Greek

culture on the Scythians is undeniable. Primarily, geographical proximity necessitated social contacts and trade relations allowed, to a certain extent, peaceful relations. In Greek written testimonies, as in any sources describing other folks, a certain discrepancy with archaeological finds is notable. The Greeks, describing the Scythians, tried, on the one hand, to understand them and demonstrate their way of life, and, on the other hand, they created works in the Greek (Mediterranean) cultural tradition inherent in them, which is characterised by a sedentary lifestyle, and therefore, nomadic the way of existence of the Scythians is opposed to the civilised Greek, according to D. Braund (2018).

Furthermore, the author noted that the terminology of the Greeks may not always be accurate to the same extent. They refer to the Scythians as an unusually wide range of cultures covering a huge geographical area, including, for example, agricultural peoples who lived in the forest-steppe zone of modern Ukraine. However, it is impossible to assert Herodotus' biased attitude towards the Scythians. Understanding the complexity of the ethnic structure of Greek society, which, akin to Scythians, has never been monolithic (Athenians, Spartans, Greeks of the Black Sea region, etc.) Herodotus tried to describe the heterogeneity of the Scythian tribes. The opposition of the Greek and Scythian worlds became the fundamental principle of ancient works. The polarity of Greek and Scythian reveals the environment of their interaction and exchange, which persists even in the event of conflicts.

Considering the way of life of the Scythians, it is worth dwelling in more detail on their worldview, in particular, on the model of the world structure. The idea of a funeral rite is to accompany the deceased to the other world. During the farewell, rituals are performed that facilitate the transition from one world to another. Magical symbolism was inherent to the archaic consciousness of orientation in space. Thus, in the Scythian model of the world, which largely retained Indo-Iranian elements, the other world serves as a haven for the dead, having a certain geographical localisation – a necropolis, in the words of G. Vertienko (2017). In spatial terms, the Scythians interpreted the structure of the world as a three-level system, where the upper world is birds, the earth (middle world) is hoofed animals, and the lower one is predators. The whole world, according to the Scythians, was held by a huge fish. For example, a vivid demonstration of this way of thinking is the golden Scythian fish (Fig. 10) – this is perhaps the only artefact that was discovered in the Lusatian Neisse River basin (territorially between Germany and Poland), now stored in the Berlin Museum of Antiquity. A slightly different picture is shown by the Scythian pectoral from the Tovsta Mohyla mound. The same three-level system has a different content. The upper level is represented by images of people and livestock, peculiar everyday scenes from everyday life. A floral ornament is placed on the second level, which coincides with the Scythians' understanding of the value of the plant world for human life and livestock grazing. The third level represents predatory animals together with winged horses (Johnson, 2018). Horses, admittedly, were of great importance in the life of nomadic Scythians. They were the first to learn horse riding, which made them more mobile during combat. In burial mounds, a special role was assigned to horse burials, and

the status of the burial was determined, among other things, by the luxury of horse bridles and decoration, as noted by S. Polin and M. Daragan (2023).



Figure 10. The fish of Vetersfelde

Source: Google arts & culture (n.d.)

Due to the widespread excitement in the search for Scythian treasures, falsifications often took place among the resonant finds. Thus, in 1895, the Odesa jeweller I. Rouchomovsky made a copy of the tiara of the Scythian king Saitaferne (Fig. 11) for an order. The replica was sold to the Louvre and issued as a true Scythian memo. The renowned tiara is preserved within the Louvre and is on display in the decorative arts hall. Replicas of this exquisite creation by the Odesa jeweller can be found in the British Museum, as well as in the museums of Tel Aviv and Baden-Baden. (Stunning golden fake: Saitaphernes' tiara, 2022). The fact that the Louvre did not get the original became known only by the jeweller himself, which constituted a precedent in this area and demonstrated the possibility of such problems.



Figure 11. The tiara of the Scythian king Saitaferne

Source: Stunning golden fake: Saitaphernes' tiara (2022)

The problem with identifying the authenticity of the Scythian finds is explained by the difficulty in determining the chronological age of the memo, since fakes made of high-quality gold are difficult to analyse, so even the leading experts of that period could not identify the forgery. The analysis requires demanding methods of examination and a special kind of technical material base.

THE SCYTHIAN LEGACY: LEGAL CHALLENGES, CULTURAL IMPACT, AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL DILEMMAS

Legal issues that directly relate to the future of Scythian finds require special attention. The territory of the Scythian culture is quite wide, covering the part of the European

states and reaching Siberia. At the present stage, these territories belong to various states, which send the finds for study to domestic researchers, after which they end up in museum collections. However, there are legal proceedings regarding the ownership of the finds to a particular country. One of the last high-profile trials was the resonance with the Scythian gold. This is a collection of archaeological artefacts that belong to four museums in Crimea and one in Kyiv. Peterson revealed that the Amsterdam Court of Appeal ruled that this collection should be returned to Ukraine. The collection has been exhibited at the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam (Fig. 12) since 2014, which has intensified interest in Scythians. The study of Scythian legacy and mysterious stories about the location of Scythian treasures became popular among researchers and publicists. In this context, the display of Scythian monuments only fuels interest in issues related to their history, culture, and way of life, according to S. Peterson (2020).



Figure 12. A part of the collection of Scythian treasures in Amsterdam

Source: Scythian gold returns to Ukraine from Amsterdam (2023)

G. Vertienko (2017) noted that the Scythian culture had a huge impact not only on those ethnic groups that later took part in the ethnogenesis of modern peoples, on whose territory the Scythians lived but also on their neighbours. Therewith, they left a huge legacy stored in burial mounds with a unique structure and rich contents. Animal-based style, as an element of jewellery decoration, became the hallmark of Scythian art, making it easily recognisable. However, methodological attention to the Scythian mounds is determined by the noticeable components of the landscapes of the Eurasian Iron Age. Archaeologists have difficulty in identifying areas inhabited by nomadic tribes, as they had varying degrees of mobility, and their architecture, which has a predominantly sacred character, acquires ephemeral features. Therewith, the problem for the study of the Scythians is the lack of

written language among them, modern problems of a global and local nature, such as climate change that destroys the natural environment that preserved the mounds in their original form, and black archaeology – as a human factor that violates the law, obstructing the studies to obtain a financial benefit.

CONCLUSIONS

To summarise, the Scythian treasures are a collection of grave goods made of gold, often in a characteristic animal style. They are hidden in burial mounds, which serve as tombs for the Scythian nobility, and kings. Therewith, Scythians were not a monolithic association, but rather consisted of several tribes similar in language and culture with their centres, therefore, monuments of Scythian culture are found throughout their distribution area. However, in the absence of Scythian writing, researchers draw information about them from written sources of contemporary peoples, with whom the Scythians somehow encountered. In addition, valuable evidence of Scythian life activity is archaeological finds, mainly sacred ones. Due to the nomadic lifestyle, the settlements of nomadic Scythians were barely preserved, which makes it impossible to get a complete picture of Scythian life.

As a result of this study, the true location of the Scythian treasures or the legendary Herrhos cannot be determined, since their search is a joint effort of representatives of various scientific fields, an analysis of written and archaeological sources, which even at this stage, with all the technical advantages of the 21st century, do not guarantee good results. Regarding Scythian treasures, it is important to understand that their search must be conducted by lawful actions by existing regulations. These regulations govern the conditions for conducting

archaeological and geological exploration, enabling the detection and safe extraction of relics without particular damage. Several factors pose a serious obstacle to their search, such as the transformation of climatic conditions, relief, and landscape, the cost in terms of search operations and, accordingly, excavations, for which a thorough legal and technical base is required, etc. Therefore, the search for Scythian treasures should be conducted with fundamental preparation, considering all aspects of the exploration. Special attention should be paid to the issue of materials lost during the robbery, which is still open and needs to be controlled by government agencies.

A place that has never been discovered with unquestioning accuracy is the legendary Scythian necropolis of Herrhos, described by Herodotus. The peculiar valley of the burial place of the kings has long been the subject of interest of researchers since a comparative analysis of the existing finds indicates the presence of greater wealth stored in the tombs of the Scythian kings. There are many theories about the location of Herrhos discussed in this study; however, it has never been definitively discovered. Its search is the prerogative of further studies in this field. However, considering several factors, such as global climatic changes, obstacles from black archaeologists, limited information, etc., Scythian treasures remain misunderstood in many ways, since there is a limited amount of data that does not allow discussing the meaning of certain symbols, objects, etc. with complete certainty.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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Аналіз теорій про приховані скарби зниклої цивілізації

Анотація. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена серйозним потенціалом наукових пошуків інформації та джерел про життя скіфів. Починаючи з 18 століття, дослідники почали ґрунтовно підходити до розкопок скіфських курганів у пошуках легендарних скарбів. Періодичні знахідки з величезною кількістю супровідних матеріальних пам'яток давали все більше підстав стверджувати, що скіфський Герр (Герри, Герос), про яку писав Геродот, дійсно існувала, але її місцезнаходження досі залишається загадкою. У цьому дослідженні представлені основні версії та теорії про заховані скарби зниклої скіфської цивілізації. Дослідження передбачає аналіз ключових гіпотез про місцезнаходження скіфських скарбів та їх співвідношення з об'єктивно можливими історичними обставинами їх існування та розташування. Провідним підходом у дослідженні є аналітичний метод, а також використано синтез, аналогію, індукцію, дедукцію, порівняльний, системний, редукціонізм. В результаті були представлені найбільш поширені теорії про існування скіфських скарбів, а також аргументи, що підтверджують або спростовують ці позиції з використанням письмових свідчень та археологічних матеріалів. Дослідження присвячене такому важливому аспекту скіфської культури, як археологічні розкопки та їхня легітимність. Загострення проблеми чорної археології найбільш яскраво представлено в досвіді зі скіфськими курганами, що значно ускладнює наукову діяльність і ставить під сумнів автентичність матеріалів, виявлених в результаті розкопок вже пограбованих поховань. Матеріали дослідження становлять особливу цінність для всіх, хто цікавиться скіфською культурою, включаючи сферу наукових інтересів істориків, археологів, геологів, письменників тощо. Дослідження скіфів та їхнього побуту залишається перспективним науковим напрямом, який передбачає подальші археологічні розкопки, вивчення речових та писемних джерел, аналіз інформації різного роду з урахуванням крос-культурних досліджень, виходячи з ареалу поширення знахідок скіфського періоду

Ключові слова: курган; поховання; звіриний стиль; скіфське золото; Герос